

Wellness Initiatives in RI Schools

During the past several years, wellness has become a priority for RI schools. Every RI school district and many independent and private schools across the State are developing and implementing more nutritious and physically active environments and practices for their students and staff. Laws have passed to better define, support and sustain this work, but most importantly, district leaders and administrators, as well as parents, students, and teachers agree that school-based wellness programs are an important strategy for reducing childhood obesity rates in RI. Getting involved in school-based wellness is easy!

In RI, We Have District Wellness Committees

In 2005, RI General Assembly passed a law that mandated the formation of a District Wellness Committees, a sub-committee of the School Committee, in each RI school district. District Wellness Committees are to be chaired or co-chaired by a School Committee member and are charged with adopting, implementing, and monitoring District Wellness Policies that address the nutrition and physical activity of students and staff. The Law can be found at:

<http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/PublicLaws/law05/law05074.htm>

Currently all 36 school districts in RI have well-functioning District Wellness Committees and almost 100% have thoughtfully developed and adopted district wellness policies. All districts are in the process of implementing their district wellness policies through a variety of school-based and/or district-wide nutrition and physical activity initiatives and all districts are figuring out how to monitor implementation success, as well build in a system for continuous improvement.

Parents, students and community members with an interest in wellness are wanted and needed to participate in the District Wellness Committee work. By law, the Wellness Committees are to be >50% non-district employees, so parents, students community members are most welcome!

Kids First (www.kidsfirstri.org), a RI non-profit, is working in partnership with RI Department of Education, RI Department of Health and RI Division of Agriculture (RI Farm to School Program) to provide technical assistance to District Wellness Committees. Staff members of Kids First are available to help you get connected with your district's Wellness Committee. Get involved! E-mail Kids First at info@kidsfirstri.org or call Kids First at 751-4503 to speak with someone and learn more. Or visit www.thriveri.org on the web for District Wellness Committee information, including an entire online toolkit.

In RI, We Have a Healthier Foods in Schools Law Which Goes into Effect January 1, 2008

As of January 1, 2008, RI elementary, middle and junior high schools, AND high schools (K-12) shall sell or distribute ONLY healthier beverages and ONLY healthier snacks to students, as defined by the law and/or as listed on the RI Approved Product List. This

law applies to all foods and beverages sold and offered to students in school cafeterias, vending machines, school stores, at fundraisers such as bake sales, and more.

The law's definition for the healthier beverages and snacks can be found at:

<http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/TITLE16/16-21/16-21-29.HTM>

The law's application to elementary, middle and high schools, including three exceptions can be found at: <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/TITLE16/16-21/16-21-7.HTM>

The RI Approved Product List for Vending and A La Carte Foods in Schools contains over 1,400 products (beverages and snacks) that meet the nutrition criteria of the RI law. The list is updated monthly and is available for downloading from two different websites:

1. Visit the RI Departments of Health and Education's *THRIVE* website for Coordinated School Health at: www.thriveri.org. The site link for the RI Approved Product List is on the following page: <http://www.thriveri.org/moreinfo/legislation.html#newnut>
2. Download the RI Approved Product List from the Kids First website @ www.kidsfirstri.org. The Product List is found in the *Kids First Cafeteria* section of the Kids First webpage.

In RI, We Have the RI Healthy Schools Coalition and its 2008 Agenda Includes: Improving Physical Education in Our Schools

The Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition consists of over 150 members representing 100+ RI organizations, schools, and districts. All members agree to support three 5-year goals and commit to helping RI achieve these goals:

Goal 1: By October 2012, ALL school districts in RI will develop and implement high quality, performance based Physical Education curriculum incorporating the RI Physical Education Standards. That curriculum will be delivered in every RI school to all school children preK-12 to develop the knowledge, skills, behaviors and confidence needed to be physically active for life.

Goal 2: By October 2012, ALL schools in RI will fully implement district- and state-adopted policies and laws ensuring that ALL foods and beverages available on school campuses and at school events contribute toward eating patterns that are consistent with dietary guidelines for Americans.

Goal 3: By October 2012, ALL staff in RI schools will have access to wellness programs incorporating nutrition and physical activity education and programming opportunities.

Each September, the RI Healthy Schools Coalition provides a Breakfast for School Leaders, entitled "*Eat Healthy – Get Active – Score High!*" that brings over 300 school and community leaders together to discuss, share and plan next action steps for implementing more nutritious and physically active school environments. The

September 2007 breakfast event focused mostly on the implementation of Goal 1. To set the stage for improving the quality of Physical Education programs in RI, the Coalition produced a video which highlights some of the best PE programs in the State. The RI PE Video can be viewed from the **THRIVE** website at:

http://www.thriveri.org/moreinfo/whats_new.html

For more information about the RI Healthy Schools Coalition or to become a member, please contact Dorothy Brayley, Chairwoman, at: dbrayley@kidsfirstri.org.